



Heriot-Watt University
Research Gateway

Comparing “new speakers” across language contexts: mobility and motivations

Citation for published version:

O'Rourke, B & Walsh, J 2018, 'Comparing “new speakers” across language contexts: mobility and motivations: Introduction', *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, vol. 39, no. 5, pp. 377-381. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2018.1429449>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1080/01434632.2018.1429449](https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2018.1429449)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Heriot-Watt Research Portal](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development

Publisher Rights Statement:

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development on 06/02/2018, available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/01434632.2018.1429449>

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via Heriot-Watt Research Portal is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

Heriot-Watt University has made every reasonable effort to ensure that the content in Heriot-Watt Research Portal complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact open.access@hw.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

TITLE OF EDITION:

John Walsh and Bernadette O'Rourke (editors). 'Comparing "new speakers" across language contexts: mobility and motivations'. Thematic edition of *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*.

Introduction

Bernadette O'Rourke^{a*} and John Walsh^b

^aDepartment of Languages and Intercultural Studies, School of Social Sciences, Heriot Watt University, Edinburgh, UK; ^bSchool of Languages, Literatures and Cultures, National University of Ireland, Galway, Ireland

* Department of Languages and Intercultural Studies

School of Social Sciences

Heriot Watt University

Edinburgh EH14 4AS

UK

Email: b.m.a.o'rourke@hw.ac.uk

Introduction

In this Special Issue we describe and analyse the practices and ideologies of ‘new speakers’ of minority languages. The ‘new speaker’ label is used to describe individuals with little or no home or community exposure to a minority language but who instead acquire it through immersion or bilingual educational programmes, revitalisation projects or as adult language learners (O’Rourke, Pujolar and Ramallo 2015). Dominant discourses in linguistics and its associated strands have tended to prioritise native speech over learner varieties. In applied linguistics native speech has often been presented to learners as the only authentic and desirable variety (Davies 2003). The revitalisation of minority languages has been framed within a preservationist rhetoric often with little tolerance for linguistic innovation or transgressive practices such as code-switching, translanguaging, or hybridisation (O’Rourke and Pujolar 2013). Work on new speakers has been informed by a theoretical framework which critiques such an approach to language revitalisation. Drawing on the work of Romaine (2006), Jaffe (1999), King (2001) and others, we would argue that revitalisation does not necessarily mean bringing the language back to its former use but taking it forward to new uses and practices. The authors of the seven articles included in this volume engage with these issues through their analyses of new speaker practices and processes across a range of contexts.

Many of the ongoing discussions in contemporary debates around new speakerness underline the challenges faced when defining the concept of ‘new speaker’. The question arises as to whether this should be understood primarily as an analytical concept or as a tool for categorising speakers, raising concerns over how or whether to define boundaries between ‘old’ and ‘new’ speakers and between ‘new’ speakers and ‘learners’. While the ‘new speaker’ label can be seen as an attempt to move beyond what have often been considered problematic

notions (e.g. 'learners', 'L2 speakers' or 'non-native speakers'), we recognise that similar to such labels, it is not itself without problems. It could be asked, for instance, when does the new speaker cease to be 'new'? Is it when he or she has learned the target language to what is considered advanced competence and 'passes' (Piller 2002) as a native speaker? Can native speakers who use post-traditional features also be classified as 'new speakers'? And more importantly, who has the authority to decide? Is it within the realm of a language authority or are these decisions made by speakers themselves? Rather than setting boundaries between 'native' and 'non-native' speakers and categorising speakers into discrete units, we see 'new speakerness' as a lens through which to analyse the contemporary dynamics of multilingual communities and their speakers, rather than a precise concept which can be used to typologise highly complex social groups. As such we see 'new speakerness' as a process which comprises a continuum of different new speaker profiles. This becomes part of a wider conceptualisation for all types of speakers to include 'traditional' speakers or 'new' speakers etc. In this Special Issue, therefore, we are careful to present 'new speakerness' as a theoretical lens and not as a label to be imposed on the speakers themselves. Drawing on the work of Rosch (1978) and Taylor (2008), we argue that concepts can be imprecise and as a result, that categories may have fuzzy borders. Membership in a category is not a binary division or an all-or-nothing matter. In the case of the 'new speaker' of a minority language, a key characteristic is acquisition of the language in an institutional setting. However, taking too restrictive an approach would exclude a range of speaker types including passive bilinguals who have begun to use the language actively in everyday life. Similarly, excluding potential new speakers with restricted competence risks creating further divisions among speakers and has the effect of perpetuating the very linguistic hierarchies which our research aims to problematise.

With this in mind we have identified what we consider to be key elements or characteristics of ‘new speakerness’ across different multilingual contexts. We use a broad conceptualisation to include the large variety of backgrounds and competencies within the language communities we are studying. New speakers often acquire the language outside of the home, frequently in education both through formal schooling for younger age groups or through adult classes. Formal instruction in the language including immersion can have varying degrees of success in producing new speakers and the transition from learner to active user is not necessarily achieved. There are also some speakers who have active competence in the language due to informal language socialisation. Such speakers may have been raised with the language as a home language, or bilingually, in settings where it was not dominant socially. Due to the absence of broader social use of the language, their speech may often contain features not associated with traditional dialects. Other new speakers are from communities where the traditional language was spoken but were raised as children speaking the dominant language by parents who may or may not have been speakers of the minority language themselves. However many such new speakers can have exposure to the language through neighbours or extended family members who spoke traditional varieties to varying degrees. New speakers often acquire a minority language to a high level of competence. Although many new speakers can use the language regularly, opportunities are not always available if it is not widely spoken as a community language. A key element of the concept relates to incorporating the language into new speakers’ active language repertoires. Many new speakers attempt to acquire more active competence in the language in domains beyond a formal language setting such as the classroom. Some new speakers use traditional and local variants, and they may overtly stigmatise translingual practices and adopt purist attitudes. Others may use more post-traditional and hybridised varieties further removed from traditional models. Some speakers have a lower level of competence and therefore their use

of the language is more limited to certain social contexts. Nonetheless, they draw on their linguistic resources in order to integrate greater use of the language into their repertoire (Walsh and Lane 2014).

Many of the papers in this Special Issue adopt a cross-national and comparative perspective which emerged from ongoing discussion and collaborations developed through our collective involvement in a pan-European network “New Speakers in a Multilingual Europe: Opportunities and Challenges” funded under the auspices of the European COST framework. These include comparisons across a range of contexts including Irish, Galician, Basque, Welsh, Catalan, Manx, Francoprovençal and Spanish. Many of the contexts discussed reflect the effect of globalisation and mobility on becoming a new speaker of language or languages. Of particular relevance here, are the experiences of migrants in adopting the language(s) of their host communities. Higham’s and Bermingham’s comparisons of Welsh and Galician and Caglitutuncigil’s paper comparing the experiences of Moroccan immigrant women of learning Catalan and Spanish provide interesting insights into these processes.

A key theme which cross-cuts all of the papers is that of mobility and the effect that this is having on the linguistic practices of different social actors as they move across and between new and overlapping linguistic spaces. As some of the contributors show, this can lead to tensions over who are the legitimate speakers, what is an authentic variety of the given language and who has ownership of it. In some contexts, as our papers show, new speaker varieties are accepted but in others, can be rejected, contested or delegitimised. Mobility can also trigger changes to people’s linguistic repertoires and many of our papers look at what motivates people to adopt a new language and how they experience the transition. While

mobility can open up opportunities to adopt new languages, it can also be a challenging experience and the process of becoming a new speaker can remain incomplete.

Jonathan Kasstan discusses emerging new speakers of the Romance dialect grouping known sometimes as ‘Francoprovençal’, which is traditionally spoken in France, Italy and Switzerland. While language shift towards the dominant language(s) with which Francoprovençal is in contact continues for the most part unabated, new speakers are now emerging and agitating for greater recognition. Elements of the revitalisation movement adhere to a pan-regional identity promoting the alternative glottonym ‘Arpitan’ which favours linguistic unity between the varieties spoken. The article investigates how such a change has unsettled previous understandings of linguistic authenticity, not only between traditional and new speakers but between new speakers themselves. Kasstan conducted fieldwork in a canton in Switzerland among three categories of speakers: ‘traditional native speakers’, ‘late speakers’ who were raised in the dominant language but adopted Francoprovençal in later life and ‘new speakers’ who acquired it purely through education. The theme of linguistic authenticity was recurrent in the qualitative data and particular concern was expressed by traditional speakers that the local variety was threatened by new speaker forms. New speakers, on the other hand, were despondent at being marginalised by traditional speakers. Kasstan also reveals tensions within the new speaker group itself between those wishing to reproduce authentically the local variety of their own area to those supporting a pan-regional identity through the promotion of Arpitan.

Bernadette O’Rourke analyses how a sub-group of new speakers of Galician resists top-down language initiatives by the regional government and promotes alternative language policies at a micro-level. *Neofalantes* (literally ‘new speakers’) refer to Galician speakers raised

speaking Spanish but who at some stage in their lives adopted Galician language practices. Such speakers engage in what is referred to as ‘majority language displacement’ (O’Rourke and Ramallo 2013), leading on occasion to the complete abandonment of Spanish. O’Rourke looks at the way in which Galician new speakers contribute to the transformation of an existing sociolinguistic order with which they are deeply dissatisfied and engage in ‘invisible language planning’ through non-governmental and spontaneous language planning on the ground (Pakir 1994). Changes in top-down linguistic governmentality in Galicia over the past thirty years have provided the potential for a new profile of speaker to exist. However, the process of harnessing that potential and becoming a new speaker of Galician would seem to be a result of bottom-up resistance. It also relies on new speakers’ ability to draw on the power of their commitment to Galician to redress the perceived inability of national policies to change the existing sociolinguistic order.

New speakers of Galician also feature in the article by Nicola Bermingham and Gwennan Higham who investigate issues of integration, belonging and legitimacy among immigrant groups in Galicia and Wales. In the context of intense migration flows in Europe, the authors examine immigrants’ perceptions of and relationships to both Galician and Welsh and their experience of becoming new speakers. Fieldwork in Galicia involved 26 interviews with teachers and Cape Verdean immigrants in two secondary schools. The study in Wales was based on participant observation of immigrant learners of Welsh and 25 further interviews. The data revealed a belief among immigrants that learning Galician and Welsh would bring socio-economic advantages and be a valuable resource on local linguistic markets. Bermingham and Higham argue that immigrant new speakers also represent new civic and plural identities: while the subjects interviewed wished to learn Galician or Welsh, they did not seek to adopt Galician or Welsh identities. However, immigrants remain aware of the

boundaries with traditional speakers in both cases and may not consider themselves authentic or legitimate speakers of the languages.

Michael Hornsby and Dick Vigers analyse the experiences of new speakers of Welsh who were educated in Welsh-speaking heartland areas but who sometimes struggle for acceptance from the local community. The authors base their analysis on interviews with five new speakers from English-speaking backgrounds who moved into a Welsh-speaking area as well as an online discussion amongst new speakers about what it means for them to be a new speaker of Welsh. Participants used different ways to describe the challenges associated with achieving legitimate speaker status. While learning Welsh was seen to help them integrate into the local community, many expressed frustration that ideas about speaker legitimacy appeared resistant to change and denied them recognition as legitimate members of local Welsh-speaking communities. Some were concerned that the Welsh-medium education they had experienced was not successful in integrating them socially. Hornsby and Vigers also examine public discourses about new speakerness in Wales as illustrated on websites and in online discussions, in particular the persistence of the term 'dysgwr' (learner) and the sense of otherness felt by new speakers of Welsh.

Immigration and integration also form the focus of the article by Tulay Caglitutuncigil who problematises the claim that language classes enable Moroccan women to participate in their host societies and are social integration programmes. The paper is based on a longitudinal critical ethnography conducted among Moroccan immigrants in Madrid and Barcelona who were learning Spanish and Catalan respectively. The paper questions the extent to which such programmes allow learners of Spanish or Catalan to become new speakers of the languages by equipping them to deploy their linguistic resources outside classroom contexts. Concluding that her subjects are 'learners' rather than 'new speakers', Caglitutuncigil argues

that the micro-practices occurring in these classrooms actually reproduce the unequal position of the women. This occurs because the linguistic resources provided are very elementary, the classes enable learners only to understand linguistic resources rather than use them and they orient the learners to inferior social and professional positions. Therefore, rather than enabling the women to transition from learners to new speakers of Spanish or Catalan, Caglitutuncigil argues that the language classes fail to achieve their aim of linguistic and social integration and instead promote 'decapitalisation', inequalities in the distribution of linguistic capital.

The concept of *mudes* among new speakers of Irish, Catalan and Basque is explored by Maite Puigdevall, John Walsh, Estilabiz Amorrortu and Ane Ortega. The Catalan concept of *muda* (pl. *mudes*), meaning 'change' or 'transformation', refers to critical moments of change in the linguistic practices of individuals during the life cycle which also involve adopting new forms of self-representation although not necessarily a change in ethnic or national adscription. *Mudes*, which lead to the mobilisation of a specific linguistic resource, are not simply abstract or cognitive exercises but acts of positioning because they claim specific discursive positions which can be recognised or contested. The authors draw on a large corpus of interviews and focus groups to examine how highly active and competent new speakers of the three languages manage these key moments in the language learning process. The analysis is based on two loose categories: (a) *mudes* related to changes which lead to more opportunities to use Irish, Catalan and Basque and (b) *mudes* with a more ideological foundation. *Mudes* related to use can be triggered by a change in the sociolinguistic context, a move to university, a change of job or for integrative reasons. More ideological triggers include an increased awareness of the language situation and, in the case of Irish, a sense of national identity. The authors argue that the study of linguistic *mudes* provides a new

perspective on linguistic ownership and legitimisation as it focuses on what it means to speakers to adopt a new language and how this is enabled or resisted by others.

In the final paper, Noel Ó Murchadha and Tadhg Ó hIfearnáin discuss ideologies of linguistic variation in Irish and Manx Gaelic and analyse the views of contemporary speakers about the utility and legitimacy of traditional and post-traditional speech varieties. In the case of Irish, the prestige afforded to traditional Gaeltacht varieties in the past is increasingly challenged while in the Isle of Man the language is spoken entirely by post-traditional speakers, the last traditional speech communities having ceased using Manx several generations ago. Drawing on fieldwork among different profiles of speakers in both Ireland and the Isle of Man, Ó Murchadha and Ó hIfearnáin analyse responses based on the framework of language ideological process proposed by Gal and Irvine (1995 & 2009) which comprises the related concepts of iconisation, erasure and fractal recursivity. In Ireland, traditional Gaeltacht speech is iconised as authentic and nature by Gaeltacht teenagers and post-Gaeltacht speech is depicted as inauthentic and synthetic although such a stance erases the post-traditional variation practised by Gaeltacht participants themselves. Although speakers of Manx have no extant traditional models in their midst, the traditional speech of the early 20th Century, which is available through sound recordings, is still iconised to an extent. Other participants reject traditional speech as not being authentic to the current everyday experience of the Isle of Man and revived speech is depicted as something that could better reflect that reality.

The volume closes with a response from Teresa McCarty who identifies three unifying themes of context, positionality and power and access common to all seven articles. She also highlights two further contributions of the volume: that it draws attention to the role and

responsibility of state-level education institutions to promote linguistic and cultural diversity and that it contributes to the ethnography of language policy.

While there are similarities across all of these scenarios explored in this volume, there are many differences and what it means to be a ‘new speaker’, can take on many different meanings. In this Special Issue we have sought to bring together these complexities, both building on existing research on new speakers and setting the scene for further explorations.

References

- Davies, Alan. 2003. *The native speaker: Myth and reality*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Gal, Susan and Judith T. Irvine. 1995. “The Boundaries of Languages and Disciplines: How Ideologies Construct Difference.” *Social Research* 62 (4): 967-1001.
- Jaffe, Alexandra M. 1999. *Ideologies in Action: Language Politics on Corsica*. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- King, Kendall A. 2001. *Language revitalization processes and prospects: Quichua in the Ecuadorian Andes*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- O’Rourke, Bernadette, Joan Pujolar, and Fernando Ramallo. 2015. “New speakers of minority languages: the challenging opportunity – Foreword”. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 231, 1-20.
- O’Rourke, Bernadette and Joan Pujolar. 2013. “From native speakers to ‘new speakers’” – problematizing nativeness in language revitalization contexts. *Histoire Épistémologie Langage* 35 (2). 47–67

- Pakir, Anne. 1994. "Education and invisible language planning: The case of English in Singapore." In *English Language Planning: A Southeast Asian Contribution*, edited by Thiru Kandiah and John Kwan-Terry, 158–181. Singapore: Centre for Advanced Studies & Times Academic Press.
- Piller, Ingrid. 2002. "Passing for a native speaker: identity and success in second language learning". *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 6 (2): 179-206.
- Romaine, Suzanne. 2006. "Planning for the Survival of Linguistic Diversity". *Language Policy* 5, 441–73.
- Rosch, Eleanor. 1999. "Principles of categorization". In Rosch, Eleanor and Barbara B. Lloyd (eds.), *Cognition and categorization*, 27-48. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Taylor, John. 1995 (1989). *Linguistic Categorization*. Oxford: OUP.
- Walsh, John, and Pia Lane. 2014. *Activity of Working Group 1: Report on conceptualisations of new speakerness in the case of indigenous minority languages*. Output of COST Action:
http://www.nspk.org.uk/images/downloads/CONCEPTUALISATIONS_OF_W_SPEAKERNESS_final.pdf